



ELSEVIER

Resources, Conservation and Recycling 32 (2001) 83–84

**resources,
conservation
and recycling**

www.elsevier.com/locate/resconrec

Book Review

The environment, sustainable development and public policies

C. Cavalcanti (Ed.), Edward Elgar Publishing Inc., Cheltenham, Glos., Northampton, MA, 2000. Hardback 232 pp, ISBN 1-84064-018-9

The book covers a wide array of subjects about sustainable development in public policy, with an emphasis on Brazil. The book is based on the adapted contributions of 15 international authors (in 12 chapters) to a workshop held in Brazil. The authors draw on different scientific disciplines to address the issue of incorporation of sustainable development in public policy. The authors analyze the basic principles for sustainable development, and discuss several examples of implementation (e.g. Agenda 21, and several Brazilian initiatives). Although the emphasis is on Brazil, several chapters provide a good background analysis of some of the main issues in sustainable development. However, using a large developing country as Brazil as a case-study also provides some interesting reading about a country that has pioneered in several environmental and policy issues, generally not widely addressed in the literature.

The book discusses the origins of sustainable development, and demonstrates the serious disconnect between the wish for sustainable development and the current practice of policymaking. Sustainable development goes far beyond environmental policy, yet policy making is generally separated in various ‘disciplines’ (as science and technology development is). Sustainable development challenges the autonomy of the various policy-making entities, as each of the entity affects directly and indirectly the environmental development pattern. Hence, the authors conclude that there is a serious need to integrate sustainable development in all aspects of policymaking. For example, current economic accounting does not adequately assess environmental degradation and loss of quality of life in the evaluation of economic welfare (i.e. gross domestic product). In fact, the current accounting system ‘rewards’ economic degradation. Hence, one of the chapters discusses various attempts to ‘green’ the national accounting systems. Indirectly, this is a recognition of the bio-physical limitations placed on the economic system.

On the other hand, various chapters also analyze the difficulty of the current policy-making system to integrate sustainable development in policies, and the inadequacy of nation-states to deal with the global challenges of sustainable

development. Several authors stress the importance of increasing the participation of all stakeholders in the formation of sustainable public policies. The chapters that discuss several attempts to integrate sustainable development on the national and regional level in Brazil are the most interesting, and are recommended reading material for policy analysts in the field of environmental and sustainable development.

Despite the wide array of topics covered in this book, and hence the lack of depth in various chapters, the book provides an useful overview of the many policy issues in making sustainable development work. The Brazilian experiences discussed in the book are especially important, as we often lack documentation in the international literature of interesting policy developments in developing countries.

5 January 2001

Ernst Worrell
*Lawrence Berkeley National Lab.,
EAP-MS 90-4000,
1 Cyclotron Road,
Berkeley,
CA 94720,
USA*